

## Physiotherapy and the Post Natal Woman | Returning to exercise after vaginal delivery

Pregnancy and childbirth are possibly one of the most dramatic events the human body undergoes, and vaginal delivery is the most common cause of pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD) (Bazi & Takahashi et al, 2016). A study conducted by Miller et al (2015) demonstrated via MRI the stress that the levator ani muscles undergo during delivery, and found that:

- 91% of women sustained injury involving the pubic bone and/or the levator ani muscles
- 41% of these women sustained levator ani tears
  - 89% had not improved at 7/52 follow up
- 9% of women had high grade tears (>50% of muscle fibres)

As pelvic floor physiotherapists, we are often asked when women are safe to return to exercise post vaginal delivery, however this question needs to be answered on a case by case basis, after a full assessment of PFD risk factors and pelvic floor function.

Risk factors for developing PFD include:

- Weight of infant at delivery (>4kg)
- Second stage labour duration
- Instrumental delivery (forceps 2x higher risk than vacuum (O'Mahony et al, 2010))
- Maternal age at delivery
- OASIS & episiotomy

Physiotherapy Pelvic Floor assessment includes:

- Identification of above risk factors
- Pelvic floor resting tone, via VE and/or perineometry
- Pelvic floor squeeze pressure, via VE and/or perineometry
- GH + PB measurements in cm, at rest and on valsalva to determine hiatal ballooning

From this information, we can determine whether the woman has PFD, is at risk of developing PFD and what level exercise and activity is appropriate for her current pelvic floor strength and function. We can also begin to rehabilitate the pelvic floor, if required, just as we would with any other musculoskeletal injury.

Post Natal Recommendations:

- Pelvic floor assessment with a pelvic floor physio for women with any of the above risk factors post delivery
- Pelvic floor return to exercise assessment for women looking to return to high impact activities; running, boot camps, weight lifting, gym classes after 6 week check up
- Websites such as Pelvic Floor First & Continence Foundation of Australia have great resources for health professionals and patients
- Referral to our Active Mums classes: group classes run by an Exercise Physiologist, targeted at mums up to 1 year post delivery. Focus on strength and conditioning individualised to each women's requirements and limitations. Pelvic floor assessment is required prior to first session.

If you would like any more information, or would like to discuss our services any further please don't hesitate to contact our Women's Health team.

## Sports & Spinal's Women's Health Physiotherapy Team:

### Candice Lamb: Sippy Downs & Maroochydore



Candice graduated from James Cook University with a Bachelor of Physiotherapy. She played state level netball for many years which saw her develop a keen interest in sports related injuries and rehabilitation. Candice has also completed further post graduate training in dry needling and women's health and incontinence and enjoys treating women post-partum and helping them return to exercise safely

Please contact [physio@sportsandspinalphysio.com.au](mailto:physio@sportsandspinalphysio.com.au) for a full reference list.